

Marketing to Teens

The Relationship Between Information Sources and Leisure Activities

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Abstract

Today, teen consumers are a commanding market segment and are expected to continue to play a significant role in the marketplace in future years. As a result of the increasing size and expenditures of this consumer group, retailers are examining more than just the demographics of the market, and are analyzing the psychographics and behaviors of the teen group. The researchers identified fashion information sources that are important to teens as well as favorite leisure-time activities among the teen participants. Results indicated significant relationships. Findings and implications for retailers are discussed.

Introduction

Teen consumers are a growing market with diverse attributes and constantly changing needs who contribute significantly to the economy today. In addition, continuing expenditures by teen shoppers will affect the retail marketplace for years to come, based on expectations of growth in size and strength in buying power. Currently, teen consumers, a market segment of approximately 39 million, spend an estimated \$208 billion annually of their own money on products at retail (Faw, 2011), and significantly influence parental spending on apparel and other products in the home. From 2005 to 2006, total spending by parents on fashion products for teens rose 35% and included, on average, \$1,413 spent annually on apparel (Klinefelter & Tamminga, 2007). As a result, it is critical for retailers to gain a better understanding of this economically powerful consumer group.

As competition in the retail environment steadily increases, retailers must consider their best position in regards to the viable teen market. While imaginative retailers with innovative strategies currently offer teen consumers many products and services, some teens carefully evaluate store offerings and attributes prior to making choices regarding preferred merchandise and store, but many teens are not particular about how and where they buy their merchandise. Some teens shop with social aspirations in mind, while others may shop for a particular item, or just to browse and see new styles or gain product knowledge (Haytko & Baker, 2004). In addition, many often seek shopping experiences that they feel are enjoyable, and expect more interaction and entertainment from retail stores.

As a result, as teens have access to expanded store formats and product lines, these young consumers have multiple choices to make at the retail level. The retailers most likely to maintain a competitive edge in the future are companies who prepare strategic plans that react to consumer demands, and create market strategies that are tailored to fit niche markets, including the teen segment. While previous research findings indicated that peer groups strongly affect teens' retail attitudes and shopping behaviors (Moye & Kincade, 2003), the researchers have suggested that teens actually use a variety of sources and experiences to gain information about products and retailers. Thus, it is critical for the retail industry to study this segment to determine how to appeal to their demands. As a result, this study was conducted to more closely examine selected aspects of behavior among teen consumers

and, specifically, examine teens' sources of fashion information in addition to their leisure-time activities to better understand marketing to the booming U.S. youth market.

Discussion and Hypotheses

Considering the significant growth of the retailing industry in recent decades, retailers must consider reasons why market segments patronize specific stores and purchase particular products. Therefore, knowledge of the behaviors of key consumer groups must be updated to best understand consumer demands. Information sources have been determined to have a direct impact on the purchase behavior of consumers, and since consumer information search behavior has been found to precede all other purchasing behaviors (Peterson & Merino, 2003), it is important for retailers to identify the information sources that customers groups utilize. As consumers are exposed to different sources of information, they form opinions and attitudes about shopping, and consequently, shopping preferences may be directed toward particular products, retailers, brands, or used generally in regards to the activity of shopping; the influence to select a particular item or type of store depends upon the information sources used (Rabolt & Drake, 1985). In addition, consumers use information sources to reduce uncertainty and risk in buying decisions (Cox & Rich, 1964).

Past research has determined that consumers use a variety of information sources, and consequently, researchers have worked to classify information sources through varied groupings. Cox (1967) classified information sources as market-dominated (newspaper ads, TV and radio commercials, and salespeople), neutral (magazines and consumer reports), and personal sources (family and friends). Andreasen (1968) categorized information sources into impersonal advocate (print media and broadcast advertising), impersonal independent (print articles and television), personal advocate (salespersons), and personal independent (friends and relatives). Most recently, Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard (1995) grouped information source categories as personal (friends, parents, siblings, and salespeople) and impersonal (sales promotions, store displays, and mass media).

When purchasing apparel, consumers use a variety of fashion information sources. Previous study results have indicated that consumers are likely to search for information before they buy apparel because apparel is generally considered a high involvement product (Tigert, Ring & King, 1976). Shim and Kotsiopulos (1992) discovered that consumers who prefer to shop at department stores and shopping malls are likely to use personal information sources and suggested that television and radio advertising, the Internet, and personal sources such as friends and salespersons are popular information sources for young consumers.

In previous research studies with a specific focus on teens, the use of information sources has been investigated, primarily in regard to socialization and communication processes (Moore & Stephens, 1975). Various studies have shown that that friends were a main source of information for teens' purchase behaviors (Tootelian & Gaedeke, 1992), peers were a strong influence on apparel purchases, and that friends were more influential information sources for teens than parents (Moore & Moschis, 1978). Also, prior research indicated that teen consumers are more likely to gather information from sources they deem reliable according to their own consumption needs; young consumers often mistrust the mass media and prefer promotion from personal sources (Morton, 2002). Thus, study results seems to suggest that sources of fashion information used by teens for purchasing are personal and vary according to personal needs.

In addition to teens seeking personal sources of fashion information prior to purchasing, teens likely focus on personal lifestyle considerations prior to purchasing. Considering that most teens make purchasing decisions for purely personal reasons rather than for the family, one aspect of lifestyle that likely drives personal purchasing decisions is the leisure-time activities in which teens regularly engage. In addition, because research results have suggested that shopping behaviors are conceptualized as a

specific dimension of lifestyle, and operationalized on the basis of activities, interests, and opinions (Li 1997), shopping behaviors likely are related to self-fulfillment social activities, or leisure-time activities.

As a result of a study of the background, the researchers hypothesized that, because consumer behavior information about teens is limited, and because teens' leisure-time activities and the fashion information sources used by teens for purchasing are personal for each teen, identifying the relationship between the two factors is a valid investigation. Therefore, this study focused on identifying fashion information sources and favorite leisure-time activities, and examining the relationship between the two variables among teen consumers in the U.S., ages 13 to 18. Since little research has been conducted in regards to consumer behavior of teens and use of fashion information sources and favorite spare time activities, the following research questions were developed:

RQ1: What fashion information sources are used most frequently by teen consumers when shopping for apparel?

RQ2: What are the favorite leisure-time activities of teen consumers?

RQ3: Are the sources of fashion information related to the leisure-time activities of teens?

Methodology

The population for the study was female and male consumers, aged 13 to 18, residing in the United States, who had access to the Internet. The sample group consisted of a random sample of teens living throughout the United States. Subjects were 3,600 random members of Zoomerang.com's 250,000 teen Internet users. Zoomerang.com placed the survey online, sent emails that allowed survey access, and captured responses. Before beginning the online survey, participants age 13 to 17 had to seek permission from parents to participate and had to acknowledge that fact at the beginning of the survey. Complete responses for 440 participants resulted in a response rate of 12.2%.

The self-administered, Web-based questionnaire was designed for online administration to acquire information regarding participants' demographic profiles, fashion information sources, leisure-time activities, and shopping behaviors. Demographic questions included inquiries about gender, ethnic identification, educational status, employment status, income, number of people living in household, and location of current residence. For information about fashion information sources, participants responded to a matrix question of 17 statements using a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from infrequently to very frequently regarding the types and use of fashion information sources that included *magazines, store displays, friends, catalogs, TV commercials, mother, father, sibling, grandparent, sales associates, celebrities, TV shows, Internet, movies, music videos and performances, live fashion shows, and online fashion shows*. For information about leisure-time activities, participants indicates their favorite leisure-time activity among 11 items that included *play sports, go to sports events, watch television, go to movies, surf the Internet, go shopping, go to concerts, exercise, dine out at restaurants, listen to music, and other*.

Finally, for information regarding shopping behaviors, participants were asked *how much time and money do you spend shopping for apparel and where do you like to shop for apparel*. Teens had to indicate how many times they went shopping, how many hours they spent shopping, how many time they bought, and how much money they spent on apparel during a typical month. For spending preference information, participants identified the product category on which they most often spend money from categories of *apparel, auto expense, cosmetics, entertainment, food, hair care, video games, and other*. They also were provided with a listing of retail store formats created by the researcher and were asked to rank the top two choices where they were most likely to shop for apparel. Lastly, participants indicated their favorite apparel store by name.

Results

Participants lived throughout the United States, and were female (50.2%) and male (49.8%), ranging in age from 13 to 18 with the greatest percentage being 17 (24.3%). The vast majority (87.0%) were white, non-Hispanic. All lived at home with at least one parent, and the largest percentage (34.1%) reported four persons living in their household. The majority were enrolled in high school (68.4%), followed by junior high (24.5%). The sample group was evenly distributed throughout U.S. state of residence, and, in addition, 48.3% lived in urban areas while the others were split between suburban (26.8%) and rural (24.9%) areas. The majority of the participants did not work during the school year (74.1%) or the summer months (53.0%); only 13.6% reported working full-time in the summer. Parents (71.8%) or current job (20.7%) were the most frequent primary sources of monthly income, while parents (47.0%), relatives other than parents (32.5%), and savings from earlier summer jobs (14.3%) were the most frequent secondary sources of monthly income.

Fashion Information Sources

The majority of participants indicated that *friends* (80%) and *store displays* (52.7%) were frequent or very frequent sources of fashion information. More than 40% of participants reported that *TV commercials* (43.2%), *TV shows* (40.5%), and *catalogs* (40.2%) were frequent or very frequent sources of fashion information. About a third of teens reported that the *Internet* (37.8%), *music videos and performances* (37%), their *mother* (38.5%), *magazines* (35%), *movies* (33.6%), and *celebrities* (30.3%) were frequent or very frequent sources of fashion information. Less than 30% of teens reported that *siblings* (28.4%), their *father* (20.2%), and *sales associates* (18%) were frequent or very frequent sources. Only 10.4% reported *live fashion shows* as frequent or very frequent sources. Similarly, only 9.6% indicated that their *grandparents* and *online fashion shows* were frequent or very frequent sources.

Favorite Leisure-Time Activity

Participants were asked to respond to the lifestyle question, *what is your favorite thing to do in your leisure time?* The largest percentage of teens (22.7%) indicated *other* as their favorite and wrote in *hanging out with friends, playing video games, and reading* most often. The frequency of responses to the other activities were *play sports* (20.8%), *listen to music* (14.6%), *surf the Internet* (12.2%), *watch television* (11.9%) *go shopping* (6.5%), *go to movies* (5.7%), *go to sports events* (2.1%), *exercise* (1.6%), *dine out at restaurants* (1.4%), and *go to concerts* (0.5%).

Patronage Behavior

Participants were asked questions about store type preference, favorite apparel store, and apparel shopping behavior. The largest percentage (48.1%) listed department stores as the type of store from which they buy apparel most often followed by discount stores (23.6%), catalogs (13.7%), and specialty stores (7.8%). In addition, the majority (67.4%) ranked discount stores as their second most favorite store from which to buy apparel. When asked about their favorite apparel store, Wal-Mart (9.8%), Old Navy (7.2%), American Eagle (7.0%), Kohl's (6.8%), Hot Topic (6.4%), Hollister (6.4%), Aeropostale (6.1%), JC Penney (5.5%), Target (3.2%), and The Gap (2.7%) were the most frequent listings. When asked about apparel shopping behavior, the largest percentage of teens reported shopping for apparel once (39.5%) or twice (24.5%) for either 1 to 3 (51.4%) or 4 to 6 (24.5%) hours in a typical month. The largest percentage of teens reported buying an apparel item once (40.5%) or twice (25.9%) and spending between \$1 and \$99 (63.4%) during a typical month. Interestingly, only a third (33.2%) of teens reported spending their money most often on *apparel*, while 21.8% of teens indicated *video games*. A much smaller percentage indicated spending their money most often on *entertainment* (18.6%), *food* (10.0%), *other* (8.0%), *auto expense* (4.3%), *cosmetics* (2.7%), and *hair care* (1.1%).

Fashion Information Sources and Leisure-Time Activities

Prior to testing, from an analysis of the responses to fashion information sources, four groupings of fashion information sources were identified and subsequently described as *indirect communication* which included *TV commercials, celebrities, TV shows, Internet, movies, and music videos and performances*; *direct communication* which included *magazines, store displays, friends, and catalogs*; *family* which included *mother, father, sibling and grandparent*; and *fashion shows* which included *live fashion shows and on-line fashion shows*. Due to the relatively low Eigenvalues and multi-loading nature of *sales associate*, that item was not included in further analysis. The four fashion information sources were used in the analyses.

In addition, prior to testing, the teen participants' responses about their favorite leisure-time activity were analyzed. The analysis resulted in the identification of seven types of teens based on favorite leisure-time activity. *Sports teens* (26.0%) were those that reported their favorite activity as *play sports, go to sports events, or exercise*. The *Internet/video game teens* (23.8%) were those that reported *surf the Internet or play video games* (identified through specifying in the *other* category) as favorite activities. The *music teens* (18.0%) were those who most preferred *listen to music or go to concerts*. *Television teens* (12.1%) selected *watch television* as their favorite spare time activity. *Entertainment teens* (7.7%) indicated *go to movies or dine out at restaurants* as favorite activities. *Shopping teens* (6.9%) were those that indicated *go shopping* as their favorite activity. Finally, the *hang out with friends teens* (5.5%) (identified through specifying in the *other* category) were those that reported *enjoy being with friends* as their favorite spare time activity. The seven teen groups were used in the analyses.

In order to determine relationships between fashion information sources and leisure-time activities, a repeated measures MANOVA was performed (See Table 1), and results revealed a significant effect for leisure-time activities on fashion information sources, $F(6, 355) = 5.15, p < .001$. *Shopping teens* ($M=2.45$) and *entertainment teens* ($M=2.10$) had greater overall scores compared to the compared to the *Internet/video game teens* ($M = 1.96$), *sports teens* ($M = 1.90$), *television teens* ($M = 1.88$), *music teens* ($M = 1.86$), and *hang out with friends teens* ($M = 1.86$), and the significant within-subjects effect for subscale, $F(2.63, 932.63) = 187.35, p < .001$, indicated that there were differences in how teens responded to the four fashion information source items. Further testing indicated that the interaction between the fashion information subscale and leisure-time activity also was significant, $F(15.76, 932.63) = 2.26, p < .01$, with results indicating that participants who reported that their favorite activity was *shopping* had greater scores on *direct communication* ($M = 2.94$) and *indirect communication* ($M = 2.86$) fashion information sources, compared to the other activity groups.

Conclusions and Implications

Teens are a growing, critical market in the retail industry today, thus, results of this study provided implications for retailers. Currently, teens have access to more retail outlets as businesses expand product lines in an attempt to capture this growing portion of the market. The retail environment of the future will be dominated by young consumers, with abundant exposure to diverse forms of media, and, because they tend to be more technologically savvy, teens will have access to more information than consumers in previous years. Retailers should closely examine the use of fashion information sources, especially those involving direct and indirect communication, to create marketing plans that are tailored to specific types of teens and their lifestyle preferences.

Direct Communication

As teens are exposed to a variety of choices in the marketplace, fashion information sources assist in providing direction for personal style and purchase decisions. Based on findings that the majority of teen consumers prefer to use direct communication, including magazines, catalogs, store

displays, and friends as their primary choice for sources of fashion information, it is important for retailers to examine the merchandising practices that are used when developing magazine advertisements and layouts, catalogs, and store displays.

Since eight out of ten teens read some type of magazine (Mediamark, 2004) and over a third of all teens use magazines frequently or very frequently, marketers can use this information and plan accordingly to offer magazines as an advertising tool to teen consumers, either in print or via the Internet. Currently, GameStop, the video game retailer, owns and publishes Game Informer, the world's fourth largest magazine in circulation. Obviously, subscribers receive direct communication and the very latest information about upcoming events, launches, and products in the gaming world. However, if proprietary magazines are not feasible, then retailers should consider interacting the teens through magazine ads. For example, teen retailer, American Eagle has successfully offered customer incentives through QR scan codes included in print advertisements.

Store displays also are a critical method of direct communication to teen shoppers. In the current study, over half of the participants indicated that store displays were frequent or very frequent sources of fashion information. Consequently, retailers must work to ensure that all store displays are creative, visually-stimulating, and interactive in order to maintain the interest of the teen market while also attracting new customers. For example, Swedish-based retailer H&M has installed runways in several of their stores that allow customers to model their selections in the store while possibly being chosen as a model for H&M fashion shows and print advertisements.

Finally, because friends are an important source of information, retailers should focus on ways to increase patronage by offering special opportunities for shopping with a friend, such as discounts or special events. Retailers can take advantage of this opportunity by networking through current teen shoppers, and by creating special shopping events that are geared toward socializing in stores through special promotions or events and by offering incentives to friends. For example, The Gap already offers special friends and family shopping days with additional discounts that have proven to be successful.

Table 1
Multivariate Analysis of Variance of Fashion Information Sources by Leisure-time Activity

	n	Mean	SD	F	p
Direct Communication (<i>magazines, store displays, friends, catalogs</i>)				3.10	.006
Shopping	25	2.94	.60		
Entertainment	28	2.69	.59		
Hang Out with Friends	20	2.50	.72		
Music	65	2.39	.74		
Sports	94	2.37	.69		
Internet/Video Games	86	2.35	.75		
Television	44	2.33	.66		
Indirect Communication (<i>TV commercials, celebrities, TV shows, Internet, movies, music videos and performances</i>)				6.08	.000
Shopping	25	2.86	.77		
Entertainment	28	2.33	.70		
Internet/Video Games	86	2.24	.83		
Hang Out with Friends	20	2.12	.48		
Music	65	2.05	.72		
Sports	94	2.04	.69		
Television	44	1.88	.65		
Family (<i>mother, father, sibling, grandparent</i>)				1.46	.192
Shopping	25	2.01	.86		
Entertainment	28	1.91	.55		
Sports	94	1.91	.65		
Television	44	1.88	.63		
Internet/ Video Games	86	1.83	.66		
Music	65	1.70	.65		
Hang Out with Friends	20	1.59	.55		
Fashion Shows (<i>live fashion shows, on-line fashion shows</i>)				3.88	.001
Shopping	25	2.00	1.10		
Entertainment	28	1.46	.80		
Television	44	1.41	.76		
Internet/Video Games	86	1.40	.78		
Music	65	1.31	.62		
Sports	94	1.28	.54		
Hang Out with Friends	20	1.25	.47		

Indirect Communication

Current study results also indicated that *indirect communication* sources of fashion information that included *TV commercials, celebrities, TV shows, Internet, movies, and music videos and performances* were significantly related to leisure-time activities, therefore retailers must assess the impact of these influences and use these appeals to attract teen consumers. Generally, *indirect communication* fashion information sources include methods that have a strong visual appeal, and are entertaining to a youthful market segment.

In this study, 23.8% of participants indicated that Internet and video games were favorite spare time activities. Consequently, retail formats, atmospheres, and merchandise assortments that place greater emphasis on entertainment technologies, such as interactive games, appealing websites, Facebook, and Twitter, and provide settings for teens to gather together in a fun way will appeal to a larger teen market. H&M is now sponsoring a successful new application for the iPhone, iPad and iTouch that enables consumers to act as roving real-time fashion trend contributors to *DailyCandy*, an online magazine featuring content that is designed to seem like direct communication between friends.

In addition, teen consumers receive fashion information indirectly from celebrities, music videos, and music performances seen either in person, on television, or on the Internet. Currently, music that caters to the teen market is diverse, ranging from Rihanna to Pitbull to Lady Gaga to Justin Bieber. Because music, entertainers, and entertainment are evident as strong appeals to the teen market, retailers must focus on the teen segment to determine how these influences can assist in the creation of attractive atmospheres and/or salable products for teens. For example, both Abercrombie and Fitch and Hollister incorporate music playlist on their websites, and successful teen retailer, Aeropostale, has created marketing strategies to encourage socialization and lingering within the retail stores by providing interactive iPads to search products and create virtual wardrobes, and by installing iPods in the dressing rooms so that teens can select their preference in music while they shop.

Summary

Overall, many teen consumers, because they are social shoppers, seek shopping experiences that are enjoyable and during which they can spend time with friends and family. As a result, while teens expect more interaction and entertainment from retail stores to enhance the social experience, fashion retailers must work to improve product lines that appeal to the teen consumer as well as their friends and family, while including store displays that are more creative, visually-stimulating and interactive to maintain the interest of the teen market while attracting new customers. While the concept of entertaining consumers during shopping is not a new idea, it has increased in importance for the teen market, due to their demands for interactive technologies and entertainment in a social retail environment.

Ultimately, teens are a key group who are driving the fashion market and want and need retail fashion formats that deliver. However, because teens are so diverse in their needs, it is a challenge for retailers to satisfy this market. While many retailers focus on the teen market to provide them with the merchandise and the shopping venues that they seek, those retailers that are continually updating store formats, marketing plans, and product assortments will be the most successful in catering to this dynamic market segment. In addition, retailers must consider the many opportunities that exist for developing information sources that will appeal to the teen customer. Ultimately, by considering, and then focusing on, teens' favorite leisure-time activities and desired information sources, retailers can prepare strategic marketing plans that satisfy the lifestyle needs of all teen groups, not just those with high levels of shopping interest and enjoyment.

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